

IN THE CLAIMS

1-39 (canceled)

40. (new) An aqueous composition for use in the diluted state as a bath for the currentless coppering or bronzing of metallic objects comprising water; copper hydroxycarbonate; a copper complex-forming agent; and at least one complexed water-soluble or water-dispersible copper complex formed by complexing of said copper complex forming agent and a copper ion from said copper hydroxycarbonate.

41. (new) The aqueous composition according to claim 40, wherein at least 40 wt.% of the total amount of copper from said copper hydroxycarbonate is complexed.

42. (new) An aqueous composition according to claim 40, wherein the complexing agent is selected from the group consisting of monohydroxycarboxylic acid, dihydroxycarboxylic acid, trihydroxycarboxylic acid, polyhydroxycarboxylic acid, phosphonic acid, diphosphonic acid and derivatives thereof.

43. (new) An aqueous composition according to claim 40 that is stable to freezing and thawing down to a temperature of at least -8°C.

44. (new) An aqueous composition according to claim 40, having a copper content in the range from 3 to 200 g/l Cu.

45. (new) The aqueous composition according to claim 40, adjusted to a pH value in the range from 4 to 11.

46. (new) The aqueous composition of claim 40 further comprising at least one brightening agent.

47. (new) The aqueous composition of claim 40, further comprising a residue of basic copper carbonate

48. (new) The aqueous composition of claim 40 having a pH value of less than 2.5.

49. (new) The aqueous composition according to claim 48, wherein at least 40 wt.% of the contained copper compounds are complexed.

50. (new) The aqueous composition according to claim 48 having a copper content in the range from 0.05 to 120 g/l.

51. (new) The aqueous composition according to claim 48, wherein the iron content is up to at least 90 g/l Fe²⁺.

52. (new) The aqueous composition according to claim 48, wherein the iron content is up to at least 110 g/l Fe²⁺.

53. (new) The aqueous composition according to claim 48, wherein the copper complex forming agent is selected from the group consisting of monohydroxycarboxylic acid, dihydroxycarboxylic acid, trihydroxycarboxylic acid, polyhydroxycarboxylic acid, phosphonic acid, diphosphonic acid or a derivative thereof.